

REMEMBERING **STEWART UDALL**



Stewart Udall lived for ninety years and forty-eight days, and passed from this world during the first few minutes of spring 2010. He was regarded by many as the greatest of our Secretaries of the Interior; he was a powerful voice for conservation, and a staunch advocate for cultural diversity and preservation.

I also remember Stewart as a friend. I first met him during his final months as Secretary of the Interior. His wife, Lee, introduced us in their home in MacLean, Virginia. He was clad in shorts, no shirt, no shoes. He was balanced on his knees atop a kitchen counter trying to screw a hinge back onto a cupboard door. I went over and held the door while he replaced the hinge. Only then did we shake hands and look each other in the eye.

"Any friend of Lee's is welcome," he said. Lee, as director of the Center for Arts of Indian America, was then my employer; we worked together on a Navajo history project. Subsequently, I was introduced to the six Udall offspring: Tom, Scott, Lynn, Lori, Denis, and Jay. Gradually, the Udall family became very dear to me. Over a span of twenty-six years, I had the opportunity to record Stewart on many occasions. In the main, I recorded these conversations for posterity; however, three have appeared in their entirety in books, and many excerpts have been included in my

radio programs. After Stewart's death, I listened yet again to these conversations, and he came alive in my mind's ear as he recalled important moments that shaped his thinking.

Stewart Udall was born into a Mormon family in St. Johns, Arizona, just eight years after both New Mexico and Arizona were admitted to statehood. "St. Johns was a farming town, a ranching town," he told me. "The main economic impacts came from raising cattle. . . St Johns had irrigation farming. My father said to me, 'Son, irrigation is a science.' Our community had what in New Mexico is called an acequia system, and you had your turn for the water, and you had a water-master, and he'd give you a little slip of paper that said, 'You take the water at 2:30 in the morning.' Well, if you were a kid ten, eleven, or twelve, and you were the oldest boy, you were the one that went to the headgate. . . and you took down the headgate and watered the garden you'd helped plant. The children had the

Left: In April 1961, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall inspects Rainbow Bridge, Arizona, after passage of the Upper Colorado River Act led to river waters undermining the stability of the bridge. Photo: Courtesy University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections.

Right: On September 13, 1962, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Udall (standing, 3rd from left) witnesses President John F. Kennedy sign a bill creating a national seashore at Point Reyes, California. Photo: Abbie Rowe, White House, Washington, D.C. Courtesy University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections.



responsibility to take care of the garden, to milk the cows. You took care of the pigs and the chickens. You were providing a substantial amount of the foodstuffs.”

Stewart was nine years old when the Great Depression swept across America. He contended that rural Americas fared better than urban Americans. The Udalls lived and worked through the depression in relative ease. Stewart’s father became a judge in 1931 and was paid \$4,000 a year. He remained in St. Johns until he won a seat on the Arizona Supreme Court in 1946. By then Stewart had survived combat during World War II, serving in the Army Air Corps as a waist-gunner and nose-gunner on bomber raids against oil refineries in Ploesti and eastern Germany. He once told me about a mission that was “a close call.” His plane was attacking the Hermann Goering Tank Works in Austria. “We were hit by a pack of fighters very abruptly. I had switched out of the waist- to the nose-gunner’s position. The nose-gunner didn’t fly. The volunteer who took my position [as waist-gunner] was killed. A twenty-millimeter fighter bullet hit him right in the face. Our plane was



In 1947, Stewart Lee Udall plays guard on the basketball team at the University of Arizona. Photo: Sam Levitz, Arizona Daily Star, Tucson, AZ. Courtesy University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections.



Bumper sticker for Stewart Udall’s 1958 Congressional re-election campaign. Stewart L. Udall Papers [AZ 372], courtesy of University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections.

riddled.” Stewart told me that he regarded World War II as the last war involving American participation where good and evil were clearly defined.

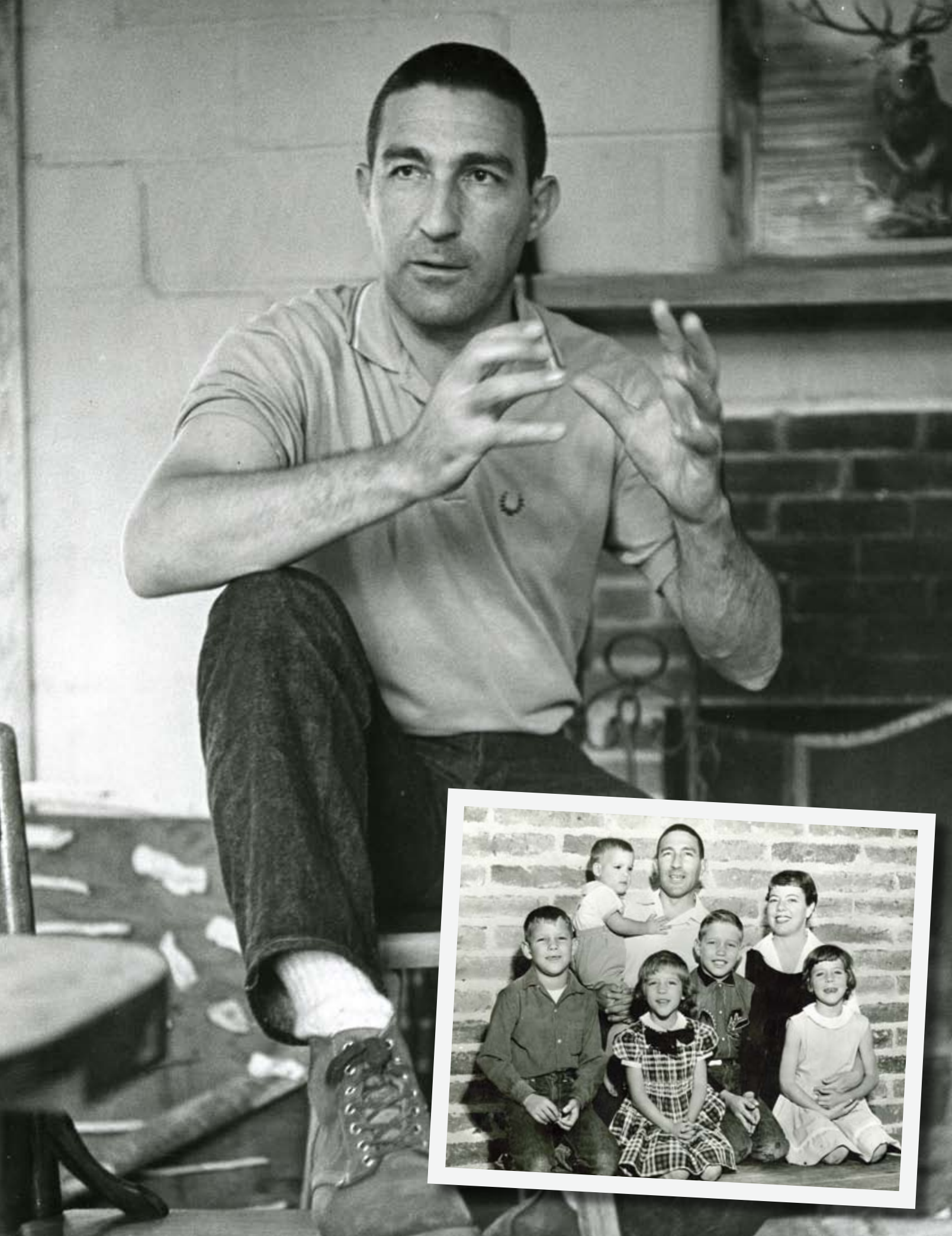
After the war, Stewart sought a law degree at the University of Arizona and

courted Erma Lee Webb, a young beauty of phenomenal spirit from Mesa, Arizona, who was two years younger than he. “I had sixteen or seventeen hundred dollars at the end of the war...I bought my first car in 1947. It was a little Ford. I think it cost twelve hundred dollars. I had to buy a car so [Lee] and I could go on our honeymoon. I was an idealist. I wrote something called ‘Testament at the Completion of the War...’ I belonged to the NAACP. I got involved in veterans’ organizations...I helped manage my father’s campaign when he ran for office to win a seat on the Arizona Supreme Court. Then later when I got ambitious and ran for Congress, I was standing on his shoulders. . .So I got into politics in 1954. I was, what, thirty-four. I later stuck my neck out for Senator John F. Kennedy, and he invited me to be on the cabinet. So all that happened from the end of the war in 1945 until 1960.” Stewart had a very high regard for both John F. and Robert Kennedy, as friends and as politicians, and was deeply saddened by their assassinations, which he considered the entrée of cynicism into the fabric of American culture.

The 1950s and 1960s were a critical time within what Stewart regarded as the ever-evolving political/cultural continuum. In 1983 Stewart told me, “I think that we made a series of spectacular miscalculations back in the 1950s and 1960s. I think that we felt that there was no energy problem. The energy problems had been solved by science and technology. Optimism about atomic power was at the center of things in that period. We had also made some very bad misjudgments about how much oil and gas we had in this country. We almost treated them as if they weren’t finite, nonrenewable resources, but that we would go on and find more and more, and that we had another hundred years, two hundred years of oil. The whole atmosphere of the 1950s, 1960s was not to worry, there

Right: In 1961, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Udall visits the Current River to develop interest for the proposed Ozark Rivers National Monument in Missouri.

Right Inset: In 1954, a Udall family portrait during Stewart Udall’s first run for Congress. Photos courtesy University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections.





For Lee and Stewart Udall — with our affection
and appreciation — Lady Bird and Lyndon B. Johnson
February 29, 1968

On February 29, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson and First Lady Lady Bird Johnson greet Secretary of the Interior Udall and Mrs. Lee Udall on the occasion of a dinner for the governors at the White House, Washington, D.C. Photo: Courtesy University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections.



On February 12, 1964. Secretary of the Interior Udall lays the wreath in honor of President Abraham Lincoln at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Photo: Abbie Rowe, White House, Washington, D.C. Courtesy University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections.

were no problems, we were so clever, we were masters of science and technology, that shortages had been eliminated for all time.”

Environmental concerns emerged as America’s postwar golden age began to wane, and serious thinkers challenged the notion of growth for the sake of growth, the fundament of the dominant economic paradigm. Stewart’s visionary book, *The Quiet Crisis*, which mirrored the great conservationist Aldo Leopold’s call for conscience when considering America’s natural resources, was published in 1963. Stewart’s early environmental perspective had been greatly shaped by his rural upbringing and by the “Teddy Roosevelt School” of conservation. He loved the wild country of his southwestern homeland and had enormous respect for the myriad Native American cultures that survived the nineteenth-century “Indian wars” and for the Hispano culture that evolved from Spanish colonization in the northern Rio Grande. He recalled that when he assumed the office of Secretary of Interior, “the Native peoples in 1961 were not only down, they were out, in a sense, because the policy under President Truman had been to relocate. Get them off these miserable reservations. The policy under the Eisenhower administration was termination, that the whole Indian reservation system was a

mistake. It wasn’t a mistake. It wasn’t made with any great insight, but the idea of letting them have part of the land that they had had—their lives, their culture, their religion were attached to the land. Their land was the essence of their life. One of the Alaskan Native leaders made a statement many years ago that became the title of a book—‘Take my land—take my life.’”

For many years, a glass-enclosed coffee table adorned the Udall living room, filled with the pens with which congressmen and President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Wilderness Act. Stewart had long championed the passage of this bill, which had its genesis in Albuquerque in the 1920s, some years after Aldo Leopold arrived in the Southwest. The text of that bill includes this definition of wilderness: “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” The Wilderness Act, signed into law on September 3, 1964, resulted in the creation of the National Wilderness Preservation System. Nine million, one hundred thousand acres of America’s great landscape became designated as wilderness. This was a day of great rejoicing for many of us who listened intently to the proceedings on the radio. Both the passage of the Wilderness Act and the inclusion of two million four hundred thousand acres as National Park land occurred on the watch of Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall.



In the early autumn of 1962, Secretary of the Interior Udall converses with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev during a tour of power utilities in the Siberian industrial region. Photo: Courtesy University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections.



In April 1961, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall makes an inspection trip to Rainbow Bridge, Arizona, to inquire about problems created as a result of the passage of the Upper Colorado River Act. The waters of the Colorado River undermine the stability of the base of the bridge.
Photo: Courtesy University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections.

“The whole atmosphere of the 1950s, 1960s was not to worry, there were no problems, we were so clever, we were masters of science and technology, that shortages had been eliminated for all time.”—Stewart Udall

Over many years, Stewart and Lee Udall visited Santa Fe and came to love the City Different. The Institute for American Indian Arts was created in Santa Fe by an executive order of President John F Kennedy in 1962, and fell within the purview of the Department of the Interior. During Stewart’s tenure as Secretary of the Interior, the school flourished, and hundreds of young Indians from every corner of America passed through its curriculum, many gaining great prominence. Later Stewart wrote *To the Inland Empire: Coronado and Our Spanish Legacy* that celebrated the extraordinary will of those sixteenth century Spanish explorers and colonists. Within Santa Fe’s multi-cultural milieu, the Udalls formed many abiding friendships. In the early 1970s, they purchased ten acres on the edge of town where they built the beautiful home, with a long view to the west, where they lived out the rest of their lives. Stewart had founded the Navajo Uranium Miners and Widows Fund and was intent on gaining recompense for families of Navajo uranium miners who had suffered or perished from lung cancer and other illnesses. It would take a fair amount of financing to pursue this endeavor. The Udalls were not a wealthy family. Stewart told me that he had earned \$30,000 a year as Secretary of the Interior, barely enough to support their family of eight. But they were always fired with idealism and determination. In 1980, a benefit was held at the Soleri amphitheater at the Santa Fe Indian School on Cerrillos Road featuring Pete Seeger, Edward Abbey, and Eliza Gilkyson. It raised enough funding for Stewart to proceed on behalf of the Native uranium miners. Stewart and members of his family provided legal representation for the miners and their families for many years.

On December 23, 2001, Lee, Stewart’s wife of over half a century, was carried away by cancer. During their many years in Santa Fe, Stewart and Lee hosted beautiful commemorative events at their home, became actively engaged in local conservation and cultural issues, and attended many concerts



Book signing party for Jack Loeffler at the Udall home in January 1999 on the publication of “La Musica de Los Viejos” by UNM Press. Left to right rear: Jack Loeffler, Celestia Peregrina Loeffler, Stewart Udall; Front: Amber Townsend, Kyle Townsend, Lee Udall, and Bill deBuys. Photo by Enrique Lamadrid.

performed by Santa Fe Pro Musica, a superb group of musicians that I’ve been privileged to record for over thirty years. The last concert that Stewart and Lee attended together, in October 2001, less than three months before Lee’s death, featured clarinet works by Mozart performed in the Lensic Performing Arts Center. I gave Stewart and Lee CD recordings of that concert, and Stewart played them almost daily for the rest of his life. Every seven months or so, Stewart would call me saying that he’d worn out his copy, and needed a new one. That music opened the memorial service held for Stewart here in Santa Fe at the Paolo Soleri amphitheatre.

The legacy of Stewart Udall is of incalculable magnitude. He came to realize that cultural diversity and biodiversity are intricately intertwined, that indigenous cultures are spiritually shaped in large measure by the characteristics of their homeland. His homeland included the American Southwest which he knew intimately. His spirit was spawned here and lingers in millions of acres of protected land, habitat that could have been turned into money had it not been for Stewart Udall. I remember once sitting with him under the portal of his home, staring into long shadows cast by a setting sun. “Jack,” he said, “we must never forget the mystery, the great mystery that is the universe.” ■

Jack Loeffler, a writer and aural historian, has produced audio components for the New Mexico History Museum and the Van of Enchantment. His article on Aldo Leopold, and Stewart Udall’s essay “An Anchor to Windward” are posted online at www.elpalacio.org. Loeffler’s 1984 book, *Headed Upstream: Interviews with Iconoclasts* (including Stewart Udall) has just been re-published by Sunstone Press. His radio programs are available in free downloads at www.loreoftheland.org.